

Full Length Research Paper

An assessment of potential resources of tourism development in Ethiopia: The case of Dejen Wereda

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The main purpose of this paper is conduct survey study so as to reveal extent to which Dejen Wereda, which is one of the Weredas of East Gojjam Administrative Zone, has numerous tourist attraction sites. This study uncovers that the absence of research works in this Wereda, however, affected the development of tourism in the area. It recommends the preservation of the precious resources in Wereda so that they could be used as a source of income that would be generated from tourists visiting the area. Due to its geographical location, in and around Abay Gorge, Wereda has many potential tourism sites. Unfortunately, findings of the paper uncovers, having such and other vital tourism sites, Wereda hardly managed to generate good income. This is due to the reason that no adequate researches are conducted in the area and eventually most of these areas are not made public both to national and foreign tourists. In addition to this, there are lack of infrastructural facilities in the area. No attempt is made to create good awareness among the local people to preserve the potentials of tourism development in Wereda. The regional and national governments, employers of culture and tourism office of Dejen Wereda, the local people and other concerned bodies should actively involve in protecting the area from damages.

Key words: Tourism, resources, development.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries. It is growing with regard to its magnitude and contribution to national economies as well as the well being of communities (UNEP, 2009: 2-3; Arthur Pedersen, 2002:11). The world Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates that

the sector constitutes 12% of the world total GDP (Pedersen, 2002:11). According to some sources, this sector has both positive and negative impacts. It serves as source of foreign exchange, employment, cultural proud, poverty reduction and improve image of countries.

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It also provides alternative economic activities such as handicrafts (Pedersen, 2002:11; Price, 1992; Schneider, 1976:5).

In the effort to curb unemployment, the tourism industry has played an important role in most states, providing direct and indirect, formal and informal, skilled, unskilled and semi-skilled employment. Employment ranges from work in formal environments such as rated hotels, tourism intermediary organizations including tour operators and travel agents to informal settings dominated by vending and hawking of various goods and services in tourist hotspots (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2011:19-20).

Besides, tourism sector has its own negative effects on the economic, social, cultural and other aspects of different people. It deteriorates the local culture such as feeding and wearing styles. Minor gifts of visitors to the local people negatively affect the working culture of the latter. Because, a considerable number of local people engage in begging in and around the tourist attraction sites (Ibid).

Eastern Africa is a leading tourist destination in Sub Saharan Africa. The potential of the tourism industry in the region can be attributed to its endowment of natural resources, which have contributed significantly to the economic growth and development of countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Seychelles and more recently Rwanda (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2011:17.)

Ethiopia was one of the African countries to establish a tourist industry in the 1960s. Tourism became part and parcel of a national economic sector in 1966 when the first Tourism Development Master Plan was developed. During the imperial period, a good investment was made in this sector. The establishment of Ethiopian Airlines for international and domestic air access, opening of airfields and hotels at key tourist attraction sites and establishment of national tour operators were good cases in point (World Bank, 2006:16-17). After 1974, the change in government in Ethiopia highly affected the tourism sector. The prolonged civil war, strained government relationship with many European countries (mainly capitalist nations) and restriction on entry and free movement of tourists in the country between 1974 and 1991 marked major setback in the development of tourism sector in Ethiopia (Ibid).

Literature shows that Ethiopia ranks 14th among African countries in terms of tourism development. South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana and Namibia rank first, second, third, fourth and fifth respectively. Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Uganda and Ghana rank sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth respectively. Senegal, Rwanda, Gambia, Ethiopia and Mali rank eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth respectively

(Mann, 2007:9).

Over 1.6 million people of Ethiopia are employed in tourism. This constitutes 6.9% of the population. The country has some of the highest and most stunning places on the African continent. In fact, 80% of the highlands of the whole of Sub Saharan Africa are found in Ethiopia. The country is old and as Abyssinia, its culture and traditions date back over 3,000 years. Many people visit Ethiopia because of the remarkable manner in which ancient historical traditions has been preserved (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2011:56).

The basis of Ethiopia's tourism product is cultural, historical and natural sites. The long-term vision of the currently ruling government is to make Ethiopia one of the top ten tourist destinations in Africa by the year 2020, with an emphasis on maximizing the poverty-reducing impacts of tourism, and utilizing tourism to transform the image of the country (World Bank, 2006:22). Even though the country is endowed of many sources of tourism, the sector is not well developed. The under development of this sector is the result of two things. One, the expansion of tourism infrastructures such as transport, hotels and accommodations did not meet what the sector needs. Second, several potentials of tourism development of the country remained unstudied. This paper attempts to show some key potentials of tourism development in Dejen *Wereda* and this contributes its own role in narrowing the lacuna associated with the latter challenge mentioned above.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research paper is written based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include archives and oral information. The researcher collected many archival sources from different offices and individual persons. These types of sources, on which the paper is heavily dependent, are exhaustively gathered through courage efforts. The researcher used purposeful sampling method to select informants. He met 15 knowledgeable informants from whom he obtained crucial information. There (3) of them were employers of Culture and Tourism Office of Dejen *Wereda*, the study area while the remaining 12 individuals were elders of the local area. They were asked several open-ended questions assessing the potential tourism resources of Dejen *Wereda*. The sample size was determined by the quality of information obtained from the informants. He also deployed structured and unstructured interviews and focused group discussion to acquire relevant information. Equally important, he used some secondary sources such as books and articles.

Huge data cannot speak by itself. Rather, collecting much information must be followed by critical and skeptical analysis and interpretation. To this end, the information obtained through various methods was critically and rationally analyzed, evaluated and interpreted. Each data was checked and counter-checked for its reliability and authenticity. The findings of this paper are discussed through narrative and explanatory approaches.

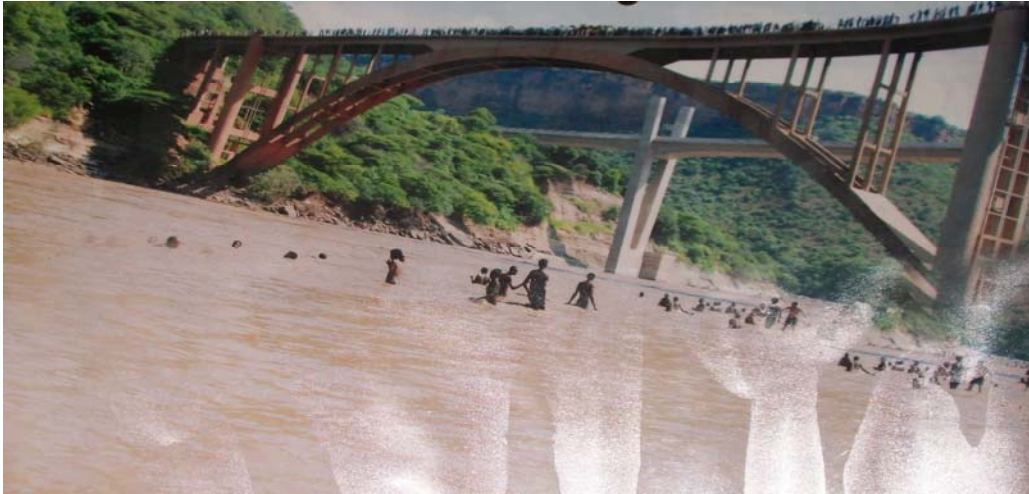


Figure 1. Renaissance Bridge. Source: Dejen Wereda Culture and Tourism Office, 2012.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dejen *Wereda* has numerous tourism resources. It has rich potential of tourism development. Many of its tourism resources are not studied due to which our knowledge about its resource is very limited. Lack of scientific research conducted in the area, lack of infrastructural facilities, absence of good awareness among the local people and a failure to make the *wereda's* rich tourism resources public to visitors affected the development of tourism in the area. Thus, this paper will assess some potential resources of tourism in the *wereda* and it will recommend tourism and culture experts, policy makers, the local people and other. These are discussed briefly below.

Abay Rufael

It is a holyday celebrated every year from 1 to 5 or 6 pagumie. It takes place in the Renaissance Bridge. Every year, within these five and six days, no less than 50,000 peoples are reported to have participated in this ceremony.¹ This ceremony is very impressive occasion during which the peoples of two *weredas*: Dejen and Wara Jarso meet and enjoy together. It helps them to strength their socio-economic and cultural link or relationship and encourages them to share their experiences, opinion, etc. This eventually plays a vital role in the development of mutual understanding among the peoples of both *weredas*. The way this ceremony is

performed is fascinating enough.²

The people of Dejen *Wereda* cross the Renaissance Bridge and celebrate the festivity on the side of Wara Jarso *Wereda*. On their part, the people of Wara Jarso *Wereda* cross the bridge and involve in the ceremony from Dejen *Wereda* side. A considerable number of peoples of both of the aforementioned *weredas* spend five to six days in the area without returning back to their respective homes. Others come to the bridge every morning at 2:00 AM. This created good situation for the peoples of both *weredas* and other else who visit the festivity area to discuss, play and pray together and this colorful occasion appear to be an important tourist attraction site. Within the five/six days, peoples who visit the ceremony area swim in the river and get a hold of holy water from the river to their homes using containers of different sizes (Figure 1).³

During the ceremony, the peoples are reported to have performed several harmful cultural activities. Butchering many sheep for consumption purpose, adding (throwing) alive hens, incense, perfumes, bottle of alcohol on to the river, performing unprotected sexual intercourse and chewing chat around the river are some cases in point. However, such and other harmful cultural activities are reported to have been decreasing from time to time due to persistent advices of some religious fathers. Two churches dedicated to St. Rufael are constructed in the Abay Gorge: one on the side of Dejen *Wereda* and the

¹ East Gojam Zone Culture and Tourism Office. Partial Veiw of East Gojam Administrative Zone Tourism Resources. (Debre Markos, 2012), p.20; Dejen Wereda Culture and Tourism Office, "Tourist Sites of Dejen Wereda," (Dejen, 2012), p.2.

² East Gojam Zone Culture and Tourism Office. Partial Veiw of East Gojam Administrative Zone Tourism Resources. (Debre Markos, 2012), pp.20-21; Dejen Wereda Culture and Tourism Office, "Tourist Sites of Dejen Wereda," (Dejen, 2012), p.2.

³ *Ibid.*



Figure 2. Yechereka Kab. Source: A picture taken by the researcher.

other on the side of Wara Jarso *Wereda*, particularly in the environs of Ghohatsion. *Tabots* of both churches are usually brought to the Renaissance Bridge during the ceremony days. Devoted religious fathers of both churches preach their people to give up their involvement in the harmful cultural activities and such efforts minimized the exercise of harmful cultural practices among the participants of the holy day. After the end of the ceremony, each *Tabot*, accompanied with many priests, deacons, Sunday school students and the masses of each *wereda*, returns back to its place.⁴

Agaw Kab (Agaw Wall)

Agaw Kab (Agaw Wall) or Yechereka Kab (Moon Wall) is found 15kms southwest of Dejen Town. It is located between Kurar and Menji *kebeles*. It is believed to have been built by Agaw people, the early settlers of the *wereda* in particular and East Gojjam Zone in general. Its building style is quite attractive enough. What make it very impressive are the types and sizes of stones the

people used to build very long and wide wall. They used very large rectangular stones (Figure 2) due to which almost all these are hardly possible to transport using human force. For this reason, how the people bring or ship the stones to the area where the wall is erected is obscure. According to local oral tradition, the early Agaw people constructed the wall for defense purpose. It is stated that there was hostile relationship between the early Agaw people and the people south of Abay Gorge. To this end, the former built the wall to defend themselves from an attack launched by their counterparts. Because of its strategic location at a high land area, the early Agaw people managed to see many parts of the Abay Gorge. This is expressed as:

*Yih kab lek ende menej mkaber hulu bemiamer
ye'aderader sere'at betekabu denegayoch yetesera kefta
bota new:: botaw ke'akebabiw botawoch kef bemaletu
beteleye ayer tsebayu tirit bemil weket marakiw ye'abay
sheleko fentew aderego yasayal:*⁵

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ East Gojjam Zone Culture and Tourism Office. Partial View of East Gojjam Administrative Zone Tourism Resources. (Debre Markos, 2012), pp.20-21;

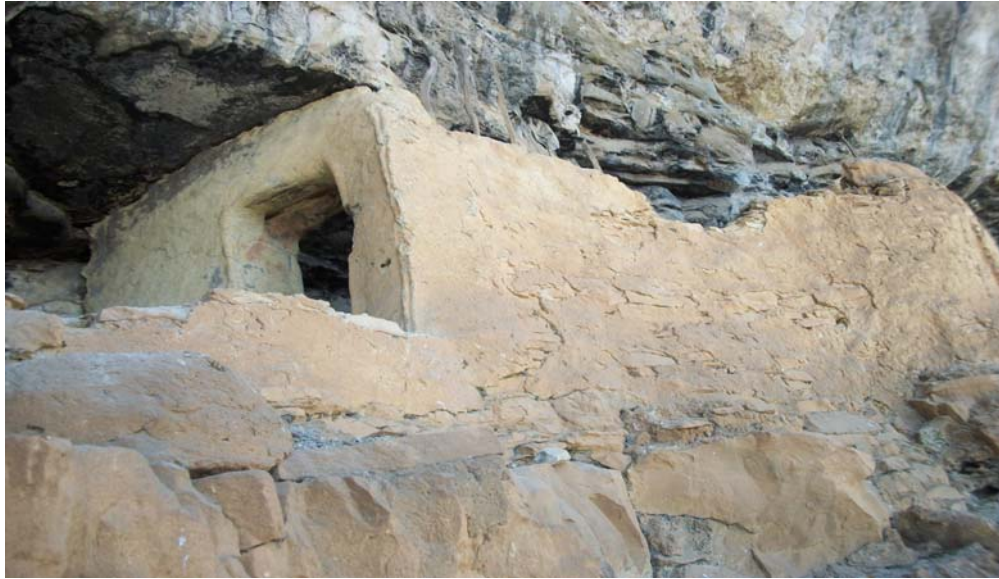


Figure 3. Menji Burial Site. Source: A picture taken by the researcher.

Like the Menji burial site, this wall [Agaw Kab] is made up of very attractive and orderly stones. Topographically, it is a mountainous area having an entertaining air condition. Besides, it is a suitable area to observe the amazing geographical features of the Abay Gorge.

It is used to observe several areas out of the gorge as far as Wellega, north and western Shewa and Awabel Wereda. Its military importance continued up to the later days: mostly during the Italian invasion and the Derg regime.⁶ Besides, due to its high latitude, the air condition of the wall is enjoyable and this is stated as *“kebotaw yeminefes nefas degemo des yemil menefes yesetal”* meaning “The air condition of the area refreshes [people].”⁷

Menji Burial Site

It is found 20 Kms west of Dejen Town. It is located in Menji Kebele. According to oral tradition, the early Agaw people used the cave as shelter since the 4th Century. They also constructed a church dedicated to St. Marry. What make it very impressive is that long aged human corpses are not decomposed still now. Besides, the burial system is very unique in which up to eight (8) corpses are

buried one over the other. Since the geographical feature of the burial site is cliff or mountainous, it is saved from different damages but from animals and people. Due to the damage from animals and people, mostly cattle herders, some corpses are visible above the ground where the funeral system took place (Figure 3).

According to oral tradition, many children visited the burial site every New Year and offer flower gift to the ancient burial site.⁸ This is communicated as follows:

*Bezemen melewecha elet eregeb nohen bezenbaba selam endabeserech hulu ketent gezie jemro ahunem hetsanat bezih elet yedesta meglecha ye’abeba gungun letintawiw meqaberem endemeyibereketulet abatoch yegeletsalu.*⁹

Elders of the kebele claim that as the eagle took a message of peace to Noah during the New Year, children of Menji contributed a gift of flower to the burial site since the ancient time to date.

Washa Shimelamo

It is a disserted cave church located about 2kms south of Minji Cave church. It was used as a religious centre,

⁶ East Gojam Zone Culture and Tourism Office. Partial Veiw of East Gojam Administrative Zone Tourism Resources. (Debre Markos, 2012), p.23.; Dejen Wereda Culture and Tourism Office, “Tourist Sites of Dejen Wereda,” (Dejen, 2012), p.3.

⁷ East Gojam Zone Culture and Tourism Office. Partial Veiw of East Gojam Administrative Zone Tourism Resources. (Debre Markos, 2012), p.23.

⁸ East Gojam Zone Culture and Tourism Office. Partial Veiw of East Gojam Administrative Zone Tourism Resources. (Debre Markos, 2012), pp.22-23.; Dejen Wereda Culture and Tourism Office, “Tourist Sites of Dejen Wereda,” (Dejen, 2012), p.3.

⁹ East Gojam Zone Culture and Tourism Office. Partial Veiw of East Gojam Administrative Zone Tourism Resources. (Debre Markos, 2012), pp.22-23.



Figure 4. Minji Cave church. Source: A picture taken by the researcher.

where a church dedicated to St. Mikael was built and later relocated to a certain plain area. It is partially natural and partially manmade. The manmade part of the cave is constructed using wood, stone, limestone and straw. This cave has two sections. The first section's size is approximately 5 meters long and 2 meters high. The second section is wider than the first one. It has 8 meters length and 4 meters height. The cave has also two gates having different sizes. The first gate has 40, 80 and 110 centimeters width, length and height respectively. The second gate also has 110, 50 and 100 centimeters height, width and length respectively. This cave has been used as a religious center until the Ark of St. Mikael was relocated to another place. The cave also served the local people as an occupation area. This can be seen from the picture included below. The roof of the cave is darkened due to smoke emitted from fire wood (Figure 4).¹⁰

Wild Cattle of Ye'egir Tina

According to oral tradition gathered from local elders by the Dejen *Wereda* Culture and Tourism Office, 200 years ago, a certain women made animal (Gider) sacrifice to a spa dedicated to Abune Tekle Haimanot in Ye'egir Tina. As time went by, the Gider (cow) was believed to have

been reproduced. Twenty nine years ago, in 1985, the number of cattle raised to 23. Since they lived in the forest for longer period of time, the cattle adopted the behavior of wild animals (Figure 5).

Twenty (20) out of the twenty three (23) cattle were reported to have been taken to and put together with no less than 1000 cattle under Yetinora Peasant Association (YPA). Two (2) of the three (3) left in the forest were cows while sixteen (16) of the twenty (20) shipped to the YPA were cows. These 16 cows leaked from the YPA and returned to their usual residence, the forest. Four (4) bulls remained in the YPA among which two were butchered while the rest two were believed to have been freed to go to the forest due to the fact that their physical appearance (fatness) decreased from time to time.

The number of wild cattle living in the forest decreased through time. Some reasons associated to this. First, some died due to the outbreak of different animal diseases. Second, some cattle were reported to have been fallen in to hills or cliffs and died. Third, other cattle were believed to have been butchered during the annual holy day of *Abune* Tekle Haimanot. In 2009, the number of the wild cattle was ten (10) of which six (6) were cows, three (3) bulls and one (1) ox.¹¹

¹⁰ Personal observation and individual survey

¹¹ East Gojam Zone Culture and Tourism Office. Partial View of East Gojam Administrative Zone Tourism Resources. (Debre Markos, 2012), pp.22-23.; Dejen Wereda Culture and Tourism Office, "Tourist Sites of Dejen Wereda," (Dejen, 2012), p.3.



Figure 5. Wild Cattle of Ye'egir Tina. (Source: Dejen Wereda Culture and Tourism Office, 2012).

Dembech (descended area in Awobel Menz Midir)

It is part of Dejen *Wereda* particularly Awobel Menz Midir, where a flooding took place on September 21, 1958 at the night time. The flooding incident claimed the lives of many persons and their livestock. Only one male and one female survived due to the help of some individuals who suddenly visited the flooding area. Oral tradition gathered by DWCTO from a certain old man, Shambel Kebede, who was 86 years old in 2009, reveals that during the sudden flooding happened, the survived female was found at a village called Jit having thrown by a natural force. In the mean time, a certain river, Yebech, across which the survived female passed through and found at Jit Village, was filled by the flooding. Surprising too, a church dedicated to *Abune* Gebre Menfes Qudus (*Abo*) was found elsewhere undamaged or not ruined. Oral tradition claims that Sebesibie Shiru, the then governor general of Gojjam province visited the area using helicopter and dispatched the report to Emperor Haileslasie about the occurrence and the degree of severity of the flooding. By now, Dembech, where the flooding took place, has an attractive geographical feature that can be used as an income generating tourism resource. It is necessary to conduct a research on it and to make it public to visitors.¹²

¹² *Ibid.*

Yetnora Market

It is very interesting market area where peoples from different corners of Ethiopia meet together for transaction purpose. It is a national market center. Many merchants from Southern Peoples, Nations and Nationalities, Oromia, Tigray, Amhara and other parts of Ethiopia come to the Yetnora Market and exchange their products. Merchants who come from south of Abay Gorge used wood made boats to cross Abay River. They reported to have paid Ethiopian \$ 15 and 2 per person and ox (cow) respectively. Those who come from distant areas as far as Borena lasted seven (7) days' journey to reach at Yetnora Market. Numerous merchants from East Gojjam Administrative Zone particularly from Machakel, Gozamin, Debre Markos, Debre Elias, Sinan, Aneded, Awabel, Debaytilagin, Enemay, Shebel Berenta and Dejen areas met at the market to exchange their agricultural products and cattle.¹³

In September, October, November and June, about 200 donkeys, 2500 calves and 70 horses are reported to have been brought each day to the market. Around the Ethiopian Easter, 3000 oxen and 200 sheep are believed to have been flocked each day to the market area. The coming of speakers of different local languages other than Amharic to the area did not hamper the transaction

¹³ *Ibid.*

in the market. In time when two people could not understand each other due to language difficulty, they would invite mediator and interpreter and perform their transaction activities. Therefore, no conflict and disagreement happen in Yetnora Market. Their transaction is accompanied by warm invitation of beers and food (what they locally called *yefintir*).¹⁴

Here it is necessary to note that this market is an important tourist attraction site from which Dejen *Wereda* in particular and the country in general can generate good income from visitors. DWCTO evinced that to date no due attention is given to this important tourist area. This office called for an urgent attention of every concerned body to share his/her own contribution to promote this market area so as to be good tourist attraction area.¹⁵

According to an archival source, no less than 100 tourists spent some times in Dejen Town taking coffee/tea each day. Some tourists are believed to have spent nights in the town. For instance, according to information obtained by the DWCTO from Tezale Hotel, some tourists varying between 30 and 40 rented beds in the above mentioned hotel. The same is true in Mafeleab Hotel where seven to eight tourists were reported to have spent three to four days in the town. Some businessmen of Dejen Town are conscious enough to improve their service to the new comers in the town. The arrangement made by the owner of Tezale Hotel is good case in point. This hotel started a preparation of foreign food in the town. Having assessed the situation in the town, the DWCTO highly pressed that Dejen Town, being custom post, can be one of the top destination tourist areas and this would be materialized through making its tourist attraction public to visitors. This, in turn, would improve the income generating ability of the respective *wereda* in particular and the country in general.¹⁶

Conclusion

Due to its geographical location, in and around Abay Gorge, Dejen *Wereda* is naturally gifted area where many potential tourism sites are found. Minji Deserted Cave Church, Dil Ared Cave, Abay Rufael, Agaw Wall (Agaw Kab), Dembech (descended area in Awobel Menz Midir), Washa Shemelamo, Wild Cattle of Ye'egir Tina and Yetnora Market are good cases in point. Minji Deserted Cave Church was believed to have been built by the early Agaw people in the 4th Century. It was burial site where no less than 8 corpses are buried one over the other and attached to the living rock. Dil Ared Cave has three sections have different length, width and functions. Their

heights vary between 30 and 50 meters. Abay Rufael is very impressive ceremony celebrated every pagumie at the Abay Bridge. It is attended by the people of Dejen and Wara Jarso *weredas*. No less than 50,000 peoples of the aforementioned *weredas* are reported to have been participated in this ceremony. This created good opportunity to the peoples of the two *weredas* to strength their economic, social and cultural ties.

Agaw Kab is another very interesting tourism site in Dejen *Wereda* which was constructed by the people of Agaw in the 16th Century to defend themselves from an attack launched by a people south of the Abay Gorge. Its way of construction is very attractive. There are some wild cattle which are living in a forest area that is located in a palace called Ye'egir Tina. These cattle have very impressive color and behavior. Dembech descended area of Awabel Menz Midir is another very interesting historical and cultural area which can be used as a resource of tourism. Washa Shemelamo is a semi-natural cave which served the local people as religious and residential place during the ancient times. Yetnora market is one of the most important tourist attraction sites in the respective *wereda*. It is very famous market area where many merchants from different corners of the country such as Tigray, Arsi, Bale and Wollo participated in the transaction processes.

Having mentioned these examples of tourism resources, it is possible to conclude that Dejen *Wereda* is really naturally gifted area for tourism development. However, its potential tourism resources are not used for the development of tourism sector in the *wereda*. Lack of enough literature showing the tourism wealth of the area has an immense impact of the development of the area. Such tourism resources are not made public both to national and foreign tourists. Due to this reason, the *wereda* hardly managed to generate income from its resources. This paper attempts to address this problem. It is vital and initial reference for policy makers and researchers.

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